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Frequently Asked Questions About Public H1N1 Vaccination Clinics

Date: January 6, 2010
To: All Rhode Islanders
From: Director of Health, David R. Gifford, MD, MPH
Re: H1N1 influenza vaccination

Question: When and where will H1N1 influenza vaccine be available for the general public?

Answer: H1N1 vaccine is currently available at healthcare provider offices for pregnant women and post-partum women up to six months post-partum, children ages six months through five years, school-aged children who missed their first doses in schools, young adults through age 24, adults through age 64 with chronic illnesses, and caregivers of infants younger than six months old. As vaccine supply allows, healthcare providers are vaccinating lower-risk patients, such as healthy adults and senior citizens.

Retail stores, pharmacies, and some urgent care centers are also now holding vaccination clinics for adults age 18 and older. Beginning January 16, many Rhode Island cities and towns will hold free vaccination clinics for the general public. A schedule of these clinics can be found at <http://www.health.ri.gov/flu/about/municipalh1n1clinics/index.php>

Q: Is the vaccine currently available at all physicians' offices?

A: No. Only healthcare providers who have ordered vaccine have it available for their patients.

Q: What if my doctor has not ordered vaccine?

A: If your healthcare provider is not administering vaccine, you may be vaccinated at certain retail stores and pharmacies, urgent care centers, or any of the public vaccination clinics that will be held in coming weeks.

Q: Is the H1N1 vaccination free?

A: The public clinics hosted by Rhode Island cities and towns will be offering vaccinations for free and will be open to the public in January and February. Please see Flu Clinic Locator for a clinic (below). Some providers, retail stores, urgent care centers, and pharmacies have vaccine available now, but patients or their health insurers may be charged an administrative fee to receive vaccine at these venues.

Q: How can I find a vaccination clinic in my area?

A: You can use the Flu Clinic Locator on the Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) website (www.health.ri.gov) to find a vaccination clinic near you. By entering your city, town, or zip code, you can find out where and when vaccinations are available at retail stores, pharmacies, and public clinics. The schedule of free public vaccination clinics is also available on HEALTH's website at <http://www.health.ri.gov/flu/about/municipalh1n1clinics/index.php>

Q: Can anyone attend the free public H1N1 vaccination clinics?

A: Anyone 18 years of age or older may be vaccinated at the free public clinics hosted by Rhode Island municipalities. Individuals will not have to present identification at the clinics and can attend any clinic, regardless of where they live.

Q: Do I need to complete a consent form to be vaccinated at a free public clinic?

A: Yes. Everyone who is vaccinated at the public clinics will need to complete a consent form. This will not require I.D. verification.

Q: Where can I obtain a consent form?

A: Consent forms can be printed from the HEALTH website (www.health.ri.gov) and will also be available at clinic sites for those who do not have Internet access.

Q: Is the H1N1 vaccine safe?

A: Yes. The H1N1 vaccine is just as safe as the seasonal flu vaccine, which millions of people safely receive every year. This vaccine is made using the same processes and facilities that are used to make seasonal flu vaccines.

Q: What type of vaccine will be available at the free public clinics?

A: All healthy individuals age 49 and younger may receive the FluMist® nasal-spray vaccine at the public municipal clinics. Injectable vaccine will be available for those who are not able to receive the nasal-spray vaccine and who are otherwise healthy. Anyone with an egg allergy or underlying health condition such as asthma may not be eligible to receive vaccine and should contact his or her healthcare provider.

Q: I don't consider myself at high risk for developing complications from the flu. Should I receive the H1N1 vaccine?

A: Yes. HEALTH is encouraging all Rhode Islanders to receive the H1N1 vaccine. Even if you think you are healthy, you are still at risk. Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself from the flu and to avoid spreading it to family members, friends, and coworkers. If many people get vaccinated, it is much less likely that Rhode Island will see a third wave of H1N1 flu this spring.

Q: If someone has already had the flu, do they need the H1N1 vaccine?

A: Yes. Many of the people who had influenza-like illnesses this year (fever plus a cough or fever plus a sore throat) did not have H1N1 but may have had other viruses. Viruses are also unpredictable and may change. Therefore, HEALTH recommends that everyone get the vaccine, even if they had or thought they had H1N1 already.

Q: Can someone receive the H1N1 vaccine if they are sick with a fever?

A: Yes. However, clinic staff will not vaccinate anyone with a fever greater than 100.4° Fahrenheit or 38° Celsius.

Q: Where can I find up-to-date information about the free public H1N1 vaccination clinics?

A: For additional information and questions, visit www.health.ri.gov or contact HEALTH's H1N1 Information Line at (401) 222-8022 (RI Relay 711).